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I

“After forty leagues on this same route [the Wisconsin], we reached the mouth of our river, and finding ourselves at $42\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$ N. we safely entered the Mississippi on the 17th of June (1673) with a joy that I cannot express.”¹ First of all white men, Father Marquette, in company with the Sieur Jolliet and five more Frenchmen, discovered the mysterious river. He and his brother missionaries had heard wonderful accounts of it from the Illinois and Sioux tribes who came to trade with the French at the mission of La Pointe du St. Esprit on Lake Superior. The one wish uppermost in his heart for a long time was gratified at last. He had opened up a new empire for Christ and for his countrymen. In accordance with a promise made at the outset of his voyage, he gave the great waterway the name of “River of the Immaculate Conception.”²

While the party floated down the gentle current in their two birch bark canoes, Marquette notes attentively all the peculiarities of this renowned stream and sketches them for us in that unadorned style so befitting the rugged primeval scenery. The flora and fauna, the mineral deposits and the fertile prairie—nothing escaped his trained eye. “Proceeding south and southwest, we find ourselves at 41° north, then at 40° and some minutes,

¹ J. G. SHEA, *Discovery and Exploration of the Miss. Valley*, p. 16. Although the Spaniards may have known the river, the most diligent research has failed to bring to light any documents attesting beyond doubt that they explored it to any extent. For a status of the controversy, see: SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 7; PARKMAN, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*, p. 3ff.

² SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

partly by southeast and partly by southwest, after having advanced more than sixty leagues since entering the river without discovering anything. At last, on the 25th of June we perceived footprints of men by the waterside and a beaten path entering a beautiful prairie. Mr. Jolliet and I followed the little path in silence and having advanced about two leagues, we discovered a village on the banks of the river, and two others on a hill, half a league from the former. Then, indeed, we recommended ourselves to God with all our hearts, and having implored his help, we passed on undiscovered and came so near that we even heard the Indians talking. We then deemed it time to announce ourselves as we did by a cry which we raised with all our strength, and then halted without advancing any further. At this cry the Indians rushed out of their cabins, and having probably recognized us as French, especially seeing a black gown, they deputed four old men to come and speak with us—I spoke to them first and asked them who they were. They answered that they were *Illinois*, and in token of peace they presented their pipes to smoke. They then invited us to their village, where all the tribe awaited us with impatience.”³

At the door of the cabin in which they were to be received stood an old man. When they came near him he paid them this compliment: “How beautiful is the sun, O Frenchman, when thou comest to visit us! All our town awaits thee, and thou shalt enter all our cabins in peace.” He then took them into his, where there was a crowd of people who devoured the strangers with their eyes but kept a profound silence. They heard, however, these words occasionally addressed to them: “Well done, brothers, to visit us.”

At the northern trading posts the *Illinois* had expressly invited Marquette to visit them. Now he was with them in their native habitat. Complacently he goes on to describe his reception, the flowery Indian speeches of welcome, the feasts at which “the master of ceremonies presented a spoonful of sagamity three or four times to my mouth as we would do with a child;” their calumet dance, their language.⁴ And his account is flattering. “To say

³ SHEA, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-22.

⁴ SHEA, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

'Illinois' is in their language to say 'the men,' as if other Indians compared to them were mere beasts. And it must be admitted that they have an air of humanity that we had not remarked in the other nations that we had seen on the way."⁵ The travelers slept in the sachem's cabin, and the next day they took leave of him, promising to pass back through his town in four moons. Marquette added that he would return the next year to stay with them and instruct them in the faith.

Tarrying no longer, the voyagers pursued their course southward as far as the mouth of the Arkansas. By this time there was no longer any doubt that the Mississippi emptied, not into "the Virginia Sea," nor into the "Red Sea" and the Pacific, but into the Gulf of Mexico. The great object of their adventurous trip had been attained. Fearing to fall into the hands of the Spaniards whom they knew not to be far off, they retraced their steps. On the 17th of July they began to reascend the river, which gave them great trouble in stemming its current. But instead of taking their original route to the northward, they left the Mississippi to enter the Illinois river, which greatly shortened their way and brought them with little trouble to the "Lake of the Illinois."⁶ "We had seen nothing like this river for the fertility of the land, its prairies, woods, wild cattle, stags, deer, wild cats, bustards, swans, ducks, parrots, and even beaver; its many little lakes and rivers. That on which we sailed is broad, deep and gentle for 65 leagues . . . We found there an Illinois town called Kaskaskia, composed of seventy-four cabins. They received us well and compelled me to promise to return and instruct them. One of the chiefs of this tribe with the young men escorted us to the Illinois lake, whence at last we returned at the close of September to the bay of the Fetid [Green Bay] whence we had set out in the beginning of June. Had all this voyage caused but the salvation of a single soul, I should deem all my fatigue well repaid. And this I have reason to think, for when I was returning, I passed by the Indians of Peoria. I was

⁵ SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

⁶ The present Lake Michigan was called by this earlier name, not after the Illinois tribe of Indians who never lived on its shores, but probably because through it lay the direct route to the Illinois villages which Father Marquette was now the first to visit.

three days announcing the faith in all their cabins, after which, as we were embarking, they brought me to the water's edge a dying child which I baptized a little before it expired by an admirable Providence for the salvation of that innocent soul."⁷

The long trip of fully 2,700 miles had overtaxed Marquette's strength and he was detained for a whole year at the mission of St. Francis Xavier, Green Bay. In September, 1674, he had sufficiently recovered to enable him to keep his promise to the Illinois. Having drawn up and sent to his superiors copies of his journal down the Mississippi,⁸ he set out on October 25. Slowly his party advanced by land and by water, frequently arrested by the state of Lake Michigan. On November 23, he was again seized with his old malady, but he pushed on and by December 4, had reached the Chicago river. Intending to portage from there to the Illinois he was forced to winter at the portage, and his journal, published for the first time by Shea,⁹ gives us a vivid glimpse of the explorer's hardihood and the missionary's undaunted courage. Despairing of human remedies, he began a novena to the Blessed Virgin. His strength returned and on the 25th of March, 1675, he set out again on his long interrupted voyage. On the 8th of April he reached the town of the Indians on the Illinois and began his work of evangelization in earnest. On Holy Thursday he said Mass and then again on Easter Sunday, and by these two sacred rites, the first ever offered up to God on the soil of Illinois, he took possession of all that country in the name of Jesus Christ and gave his mission the name of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin.¹⁰ Compelled to leave, he desired to die amid his brethren at Michilimackinac and tried to reach it by following the eastern, to him unknown, shore of Lake Michigan. His strength was spent, and he died in the wilderness on May 18, 1675.¹¹

But his work did not die with him. The white man's labor

⁷ SHEA, *op. cit.*, pp. 51, 52.

⁸ The Sieur Jolliet had already left for Canada with his maps and a detailed log of their trip down the river. But all his papers were lost when he suffered shipwreck on the St. Lawrence. Hence the great historical value attaching to Fr. Marquette's recital, the only one in existence.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 258ff.

¹⁰ SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹¹ *Op. cit.*, p. xxi.

in Illinois had just begun. Father Allouez soon took up the burden. He embarked about the close of October, 1676, in a canoe with two men to endeavor to go and winter with the Illinois. But the ice stopped him, and it was only in April, 1677, that he reached his destination and found himself a most welcome visitor among the Kaskaskias,¹² the Illinois tribe already visited by Marquette. They had gathered around them seven more tribes from the surrounding territory. He had little time to remain, having come mainly to acquire the necessary information for the establishment of a permanent mission. He baptized thirty-five children and one sick adult, who soon after died with one of the infants "to go and take possession of heaven in the name of the whole nation. And we, too, to take possession of these tribes in the name of Jesus Christ, on the third of May, the feast of the Holy Cross, erected in the midst of the town a cross 25 feet high, chanting the *Vexilla Regis* in the presence of a great number of Illinois of all tribes, of whom I can say in truth that they did not take Jesus Christ Crucified for a folly nor for a scandal; on the contrary, they witnessed the ceremony with great respect and heard all that I said on the mystery with great admiration. The children even went to kiss the cross through devotion and the old earnestly commended me to place it well so that it would not fall."

Leaving the tribes for a short while, he returned in 1678. But it was bruited about that a new explorer was on his way to the Illinois country, a man rather prejudiced against Allouez and whom the latter did not wish to meet. He retired from his mission, visiting it only at intervals up to 1689, the year in which he probably died.¹³

¹² SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 74 note, judging from the latitude given by Allouez, thinks they must have been established near "Rockfort." Identification of the site would be difficult had not later investigations shown that they must have dwelt near "Rock Fort," the later Fort St. Louis of La Salle or the present "Starved Rock." OSMAN, *Starved Rock*, p. 194. The tribe figures quite largely in subsequent Illinois history, and was, in common with other Indian tribes, of migratory habits. Fr. Membré (SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 150) in 1680 places them above the river Checagoumemant or Chicago. Later on we find them definitely settled on the Mississippi, in southern Illinois, where they gave their name to a village that was for a time the capital of Illinois.

¹³ SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 70 note.

The much heralded and hardy explorer whom Allouez feared was none other than his countryman, Robert Cavelier de la Salle, to whom Illinois is indebted for its first regularly established colonies of white men.

With him also came other missionaries, the Recollects, to take the place of the Jesuits, whom La Salle unjustly accused of dark intrigues to ruin his projects.¹⁴ At this point a new era opens in the history of Illinois and the whole Mississippi valley. Coureurs de bois, whites and half breeds, had traversed the country back and forth, bent only on profitable trade with the Indians and leaving no records behind them. But now an organized attempt was set on foot, with the support of the home government, to evangelize, civilize and settle the vast western lands for the benefit of France. It speaks volumes for the spirit of daring adventure and enterprise of the French that they should contemplate and carry to conclusion this stupendous enterprise. And circumstances favored them. In the opening of the North American continent the Frenchman had this great advantage over some of his rivals, that he entered the land from the right direction and at a very strategic point. The first important expedition which the French sent out to the New World, that of Jacques Cartier in 1534, brought them at once to the mouth of the St. Lawrence and set them on the most inviting part of the vast interior. As a consequence of this, and of the further fact that by nature the Frenchmen who came to America were of a more roving disposition than the English, their explorations moved much more rapidly. They covered the ground a score of times and had ranged and mapped the country continuously from Labrador to the Gulf of Mexico, before the English yet knew the upper course of the St. James, the Hudson and the Connecticut.¹⁵

La Salle's projects were of truly imperial scope. Armed with letters patent from Louis XIV, king of France, he set out from Fort Frontenac on the St. Lawrence in 1678. Pushing on with iron determination, he was soon on the Niagara river, where his first vessel, the *Griffin*, was launched in August, 1679. He destined it for the Lakes' trade. With him were the Flemish

¹⁴ PARKMAN, *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*, p. 238 note. For a fine sketch of the explorer's character, see *ibid*, p. 430.

¹⁵ F. A. OGG, *The Opening of the Mississippi*, pp. 183-184.

Recollect friars: Louis Hennepin, Gabriel de la Ribourde, Melithon Watteau, Zenobius Membré. Father Hennepin had recently discovered Niagara Falls, the first white man to behold them in all their pristine glory. Greater work was in store for this hardy pioneer. La Salle's company also included the faithful Henry de Tonty who was to distinguish himself on many occasions, besides carpenters, blacksmiths and other tradesmen. On the Illinois river he intended to build another craft for trade on these waters.

Setting out from Michilimackinac, La Salle came down the western shore of the lake and skirted its southern extremity to the St. Joseph river, where Tonty and his party were to join him by descending the eastern shore. They met in November. On December 3, they embarked, thirty-three in all, in eight canoes, and there ascended the St. Joseph. On approaching the site of the present city of South Bend, they looked anxiously on the shore on their right to find the portage leading to the headwaters of the Illinois. With the help of a Mohigan Indian in the party it was found, and shouldering their canoes and baggage, they traveled five miles over oozy soil to the Kankakee river. Soon they were once more afloat, and found themselves drifting into the Seignelay or Illinois. The prairies, stretching far and wide, looked bleak and desolate; but they gave evidence of supporting immense herds of buffalo whose skins were to afford La Salle the wherewithal to continue his explorations. Starved Rock, steep and forbidding, towered along the left bank, while on the right was the great Illinois village where Father Marquette had preached in 1675. The camp was lifeless, since the inhabitants had not returned from their winter hunting. La Salle's party was short of food, and at the risk of incurring the wrath of the Indians, they opened their caches of corn, helping themselves to whatever they needed, and leaving presents instead. Thus secured against famine, they set out once more on their downward journey.

On New Year's Day, 1680, they landed and heard Mass said by Father Hennepin, who addressed the men, exhorting them to patience, faith and constancy. On January 5, they reached the long expansion of the river called Pimiteoui or Peoria Lake and leisurely made their way to the site of the present city of Peoria. A trail of smoke betokened the presence of Indians. The shores

approached each other, and the Illinois was once more a river. At 9 o'clock the next morning, doubling a point, La Salle saw about eighty Illinois wigwams on both banks. The Indians were ready to swoop down upon the intruders, but La Salle at the head of a few armed men made a daring sally right in their midst which brought forth the calumet of peace. Food was placed before them, and, as the Illinois code of courtesy enjoined, their entertainers conveyed the morsels with their own hands to the lips of the unenviable victims of their hospitality, while others rubbed their feet with bear's grease. La Salle promised to defend them against their deadly enemies, the Iroquois, if they would allow him to build a post among them and a great wooden canoe to descend the Mississippi to the sea and bring them the goods they wanted and needed. The Illinois were well disposed, but Indian intriguers from other camps appeared during the night to undo his work, and so terrified became some of his men at the risk they faced in the wilderness that they deserted under cover of darkness.¹⁶

La Salle now resolved to leave the Indian camp to fortify himself for the winter in a strong position. About the middle of January a thaw broke up the ice and, together with Hennepin, he set out in a canoe to visit the site he had chosen for his projected fort. It was half a league below the Indian camp, on a knoll 200 yards from the southern bank. On either side was a deep ravine, and in front a marshy tract overflowed at high water. Under his direction his men dug a ditch behind the hill connecting the two ravines and thus completely isolating it. An embankment of earth was thrown up on every side while a palisade twenty-five feet high was planted around the whole. The lodgings of the men were at two of the angles; the house of the friars, Hennepin, Ribourde, Membré, at the third; the forge and magazine at the fourth, and the tents of La Salle and Tonty in the area within. Father Hennepin laments the failure of wine which prevented him from saying Mass, but every morning and evening he gathered the men in his cabin for prayers and preaching, and on Sundays and festivals they chanted vespers. Father Membré usually spent his days in the Indian camp striving to win them to the faith and

¹⁶ PARKMAN, *La Salle*, p. 172.

to overcome the disgust with which their manners and habits inspired him.¹⁷

Such was the first white occupation of the region which now forms the state of Illinois. La Salle christened the new fort Fort Crêvecœur. The name tells of disaster and suffering in the past and was prophetic of the future. But nothing could ever daunt the iron-hearted constancy of the sufferer. The ship he had set out to build at Fort Crêvecœur could not be finished. Of his Niagara vessel, the *Griffin*, he received no tidings. Harassed by anxieties and by his creditors, he resolved on a trip to Montreal in the middle of the winter. He set out, and in sixty-five days he traveled over 1,000 miles, truly "the most arduous trip ever made by Frenchmen in America."¹⁸ Before leaving, he had ordered Father Hennepin to explore the Illinois to the Mississippi,¹⁹ thus to prepare the way for him. Hennepin left Fort Crêvecœur where the hardy and faithful Tonty remained as commander, on February 29, 1680. He arrived at the mouth of the river about March 8. Leaving on March 12, he canoed up the Mississippi, whose northern course he was the first white man to explore, as far as the Falls of St. Anthony. Taken a prisoner by the Sioux on April 11, he underwent great hardships and was in constant danger of his life. Rescued by Duluth in July, 1681, he proceeded to Montreal and to Europe, never to return.²⁰

The vicissitudes of the two other missionary priests in the party are thus detailed by Father Membre: "From our arrival at Fort Crêvecœur on the 14th of January, Father Gabriel, our superior, Father Louis and myself had raised a cabin in which we had established some little regularity, exercising our functions as missionaries to the French of our party and to the Illinois Indians

¹⁷ His narrative is given in SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 147ff. The first impression which the missionaries received on coming in contact with the Illinois was very favorable, as Father Marquette testifies. But on closer acquaintance it underwent a great change: Fr. Membre, in SHEA, p. 15. Unflagging zeal overcame all obstacles and after a few years Christianity found in them submissive subjects. Father Marest, writing in 1712 (SHEA, *op. cit.*, note, p. 25) has nothing but praise for them. The labor and devotion that produced these results can only be imagined.

¹⁸ PARKMAN, p. 189.

¹⁹ SHEA, pp. 107ff.

²⁰ Fr. Hennepin published a twofold account of his explorations and adventures; one in 1684 and one in 1697. The latter was also published in England in 1699. He has been mercilessly attacked and exposed by all historians for his untruthfulness and dishonest literary methods. SHEA, pp. 99ff; PARKMAN, pp. 242ff.

who came in crowds. As by the end of February, I already knew a part of their language, because I spent the whole of the day in the Indian camp which was but half a league off, our father superior appointed me to follow them when they were about to return to their village. A chief named Oumahouha had adopted me as his son in the Indian fashion, and Mr. de la Salle had made him presents to take care of me. Father Gabriel resolved to stay at the fort with the Sieur de Tonty and the workmen. This had also been the request of the Sieur de la Salle, who hoped that by his credit and the apparent confidence of the people in him he would be able to keep them in order. But God permitted that the good intentions in which the Sieur de la Salle left them should not last long."²¹

Indeed, shortly after La Salle's and Hennepin's departure nearly all the men at Fort Crêvecœur mutinied and deserted, plundering the magazine and throwing into the river all the arms, goods and stores which they could not carry off. The space of three months saw the beginning and the end of the first white colony in Illinois.²²

²¹ SHEA, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²² PARKMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 199, says they destroyed the fort. But Fr. Membré makes no mention of this when relating the incident of their desertion, and later on he expressly states that they found it intact on their return; SHEA, p. 166. Fort Crêvecœur, however, seems to have played no further rôle of importance in Illinois history. In the later letters of missionaries mention is made several times of "the fort." In his edition of the *Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents*, Dr. Thwaites notes that "Fort Crêvecœur" is meant: Vol. lxiv, pp. 161, 201, 203; also Vol. lxvi, p. 287, in a letter of Fr. Marest, November, 1712. But the description of Fr. Marest makes it clear that he means "Fort St. Louis" built by La Salle and Tonty farther to the north in December, 1682. Fr. Marest tells us that he came by way of the St. Joseph river, portaging from there to the Kankakee: "The Peoria savages came some leagues to meet me. When I drew near the village, the greater part of the men ascended to the *Fort which is placed upon a rock on the bank of the river.*" That can be true only of Fort St. Louis. Father Marest also mentions that he gathered the Indians together in the chapel "outside the fort." There was a chapel outside of Fort St. Louis, but there was none at Fort Crêvecœur. OSMAN, *Starved Rock*, p. 139. Confusion with regard to these two forts of La Salle seems to have originated very early. Franquelin's famous map of 1684 shows in detail the "Colonie du Sieur de la Salle," but only Fort St. Louis is indicated thereon. (PARKMAN, *op. cit.*, p. 315.) His map of 1688 shows also Fort Crêvecœur. Popples' map, undated, in the British Museum, made about the year 1700, shows Fort St. Louis and Fort Crêvecœur at the same place. An old French Official Map, in the British Museum, dated 1718, has: Fort Louis, appelé cy devant Fort Crêvecœur. On Tillman's map, 1688, only Fort de Crêvecœur is given. Copies of these maps may be found in: J. F. STEWARD, *Lost Maramech and Earliest Chicago*, 1903.

Father Ribourde and Henry de Tonty followed Father Membré to the great Illinois village, where in September, 1680, took place one of the fiercest dramas of savage warfare ever witnessed on Illinois territory. The bloodthirsty Iroquois, instigated by Dutch and English traders in the east who wished them to get a monopoly in the western fur country, wreaked an awful vengeance on the Illinois, destroying all they found and venting even their insatiable fury on the interred bodies of the tribe's dead.²³ Seeing themselves abandoned by the terror-stricken and fleeing Illinois, Tonty, the two fathers and their handful of men, "left alone, exposed to the fury of a savage and victorious enemy, were not long in resolving to retreat." They began their march on September 18, without provisions, food or anything, in a wretched bark canoe, which, breaking the next day, compelled them to land about noon to repair it. "Father Gabriel, seeing the place of our landing fit for walking in the prairies and hills with little groves as if planted by hand, retired to say his breviary while we were working at the canoe all the rest of that day. We were full eight leagues from the village ascending the river. Toward evening I went to look for the father, seeing that he did not return; all our party did the same. We fired repeatedly to direct him, but in vain." He had been murdered by some roving Kickapoo braves, who carried off his scalp. On September 19, 1680, the first martyr of the faith was killed on Illinois soil, and Father Membré pays him a simple but fitting and heartfelt tribute.²⁴ The little party of white men fled as fast as circumstances permitted. "I made shoes for my companions and myself of Father Gabriel's cloak," notes Father Membré,²⁵ and they supported the remnant of a languishing life by potatoes and garlick and other roots that they found by scraping the ground with their fingers. After thirty-four days of starvation they arrived at Green Bay, where the Jesuits received them kindly and kept them through the winter.

La Salle had returned in the meantime, found the great Illinois village in ruins and gone north to spend the winter on the St. Joseph. In the spring he traveled to Mackinack, where Membré joined him, and together they traveled to Fort Fron-

²³ See details in SHEA, *op. cit.*, *Membré's Narrative*, pp. 154ff; also PARKMAN, p. 217.

²⁴ SHEA, pp. 158-159.

²⁵ SHEA, p. 159.

tenac. Thence they set out shortly, La Salle more determined than ever to explore the Mississippi to the gulf. On November 3, 1681, they were once more on the St. Joseph river, a party of fifty-four persons, including ten Indian squaws and three children. Membré and Tonty were detached with some men to skirt Lake Dauphin (Michigan), to go to "the divine river, called by the Indians, Checagou,"²⁶ to make necessary arrangements for the voyage. Once more they were on Illinois soil where so many disappointments had fallen to their lot. On December 27, they made a portage to the Illinois river with the help of sleighs. They had to drag their canoes and baggage 80 leagues on the river ice. Traversing the great Illinois town, they found it empty, the inhabitants having gone to winter 30 leagues lower down on Lake Pimiteoui (Peoria), where Fort Crêvecœur was found in good state. From here on they found navigation open. Embarking in their canoes, they reached the mouth of the river on February 6. The floating ice on the Mississippi kept them at this place until February 13, when they set out again, reaching the Gulf at last on April 9, 1682. "With all possible solemnity," relates Father Membré, the only one of the original band of missionaries to share to the end in the glorious quest, "we performed the ceremony of planting the cross and raising the arms of France. After we had chanted the hymn of the Church: *Vexilla Regis*, and the *Te Deum*, the Sieur de la Salle, in the name of His Majesty, took possession of that river, of all the rivers that enter it, and all the country watered by them."²⁷ A truly imperial domain, christened Louisiana and containing about a million and a quarter square miles! Yet Louis XIV, when the matter had been reported to him, wrote to Fontainebleau, his governor in Canada: "I am convinced that the discovery of the Sieur de la Salle is very useless, and that such enterprises ought to be prevented in the future, as they tend only to debauch the inhabitants by the hope of gain, and to diminish the revenue from beaver skins!"²⁸

²⁶ PARKMAN, p. 167, note, says that the "Kankakee" was called also the "divine river" and that the name was applied at times to the whole course of the Illinois. Membré (SHEA, p. 166) expressly states that the name "divine river" was given to a stream called by the Indians "Checagou." The origin and meaning of the French name, *Rivière de la Divine*, has thus far not been accounted for.

²⁷ SHEA, p. 174.

²⁸ OGG, *op. cit.*, p. 324.

La Salle had found the much desired outlet for his ambitious colonial enterprise that was to center in the Illinois country. Thither he intended to return at once since food was very scarce. Father Membré graphically describes their plight: "We were out of provision and food and found only some dried meat at the mouth (of the river) which we took to appease our hunger; but soon after, perceiving it to be *human flesh*, we left the rest to our Indians. *It was very good and delicate!*"²⁹

The day after the solemn "prise de possession," on April 10, they began to remount the river, living only on potatoes and crocodiles (alligators). La Salle was taken dangerously ill 100 leagues below the mouth of the Illinois river, and Father Membré attended him. Tonty in the meanwhile was despatched to the Illinois to set everything in order there for a new colony. At the end of July, La Salle was once more able to travel by slow journeys, and at the end of September, 1682, he was back on the St. Joseph river. A report reached him that the Iroquois were once more on the warpath, and he hastened to rejoin Tonty on the Illinois, on the site of the great town wiped out by them shortly before. Starved Rock was chosen as the easiest place to fortify against the inroads of the savages and there in the month of December, La Salle and Tonty began to intrench themselves, calling it Fort St. Louis. The trees were cut down and the timber used for storehouses and dwellings and a chapel, while the whole was encircled with palisades. On the open prairie stretching on all sides, a concourse of Indians of all tribes soon gathered, and La Salle, in a report to the Minister of the Marine, puts their number at 4,000 warriors or about 20,000 souls. A small number of whites received grants of land to cultivate around the fort, and the colony was prosperous in a short time. Trouble, however, was again pursuing La Salle. His friend and supporter, Count Frontenac, had been removed as governor of Canada, and De la Barre, his bitter opponent, appointed instead. Leaving Tonty in command of Fort St. Louis, La Salle decided to go to Quebec and to France, while De la Barre sent the Chevalier de Baugis to seize the colony and take possession of the fort.

La Salle was never to return to the Illinois country for which

²⁹ SHEA, p. 175.

he had done so much. He obtained permission from the king to equip an expedition to reach the Mississippi from the Gulf. He was determined to establish a direct all-water trade route between his Illinois colony and France that would enable him to avoid forever his Canadian persecutors and rivals. The expedition failed miserably and La Salle was assassinated in 1687.³⁰

Henry de Tonty, forcibly ejected from Fort St. Louis of the Illinois, had no sooner heard of La Salle's plight in Texas than he left his fortified rock in February 13, 1686, to go to his rescue. He failed to find him at the mouth of the Mississippi and returned to the Illinois. On September 14, 1686, the remnant of La Salle's unhappy expeditionary party reached Fort St. Louis and repaired to the chapel to sing a fervent *Te Deum* in thanksgiving for their preservation.³¹ There were two priests in the party, Father Cavalier, a Sulpitian and La Salle's brother, and Father Anastase Douay, a Recollect. The Jesuit, Father Allouez, was lying ill at the fort. By common agreement of the survivors, the death of La Salle had been concealed from everyone for fear that it might cause a relaxation of discipline, and Father Allouez, supposing, as did all the others, that he was on his way to Fort St. Louis, was deeply agitated and left a week later very precipitately and for the second time to avoid a meeting with him. The survivors intended to return to Quebec in all haste, and made their way across country to Chicago. They were unable to go any farther because of severe storms and returned to Fort St. Louis in October. They wintered there and set out again on March 21, 1687, reaching Chicago on March 29. They arrived in France early in October. Abbé Cavalier made a report of the expedition to the minister, Seignelay, and addressed to the king a memorial on the importance of keeping possession of the Illinois country. La Salle's far-seeing mind had not deceived him, and he knew the importance of the Illinois country if France was to retain the immense colonial domain that had become French by right of discovery. But the rulers at Versailles, lacking his

³⁰ PARKMAN, p. 459.

³¹ Thus Joutel's account. Father Anastasius Douay, whose account of the adventurous trip is printed by SHEA, p. 224, as written originally by Father Christian Le Clerc, states that they went to "Fort Crèvecoeur." But this is undoubtedly a mistake, as there is no trace of any white colony left at Fort Crèvecoeur after it had been abandoned by La Salle: see note 22 above.

knowledge, relaxed their hold. And the death of La Salle closes the first and most brilliant chapter in the history of the exploration, christianization and civilization of Illinois. It is a history full of deeds of daring by Frenchmen and Catholics, missionaries and laymen alike.

The well-nigh inexhaustible resources of the country had barely been touched. The colony at Fort St. Louis was big with promises for a bright future. When its builder and guiding genius passed away, it held its own only for a short while. The injustice done to Tonty by his forcible ejection was repaired, and a royal decree made him co-proprietor of the fort with La Forest, La Salle's lieutenant. Once more he set out from there in December, 1688, on hearing of La Salle's death, to go to the rescue of his Texas colony, but he found that the few Frenchmen left there had been massacred by the Indians. Tonty was forced to retrace his steps, and reached his post on the Illinois in September, 1689. He is one of the great figures in French-American history, although no biography has ever been written to do justice to his merits. He kept on trading at his Fort of St. Louis until in 1702 a royal order sent him to reside on the Mississippi. The establishment on the Illinois was to be discontinued. Tonty joined d'Iberville in lower Louisiana. But Fort St. Louis was too valuable a center to be entirely abandoned, and the French reoccupied it again. In 1718, a number of them were living there, chiefly traders. In 1721, however, it was once more deserted, and Father Charlevoix, passing the spot, saw only the remains of its palisades. Its history of well-nigh forty years, however, had put the white man in permanent control of Illinois. And while French influence waned in the north, it had been quietly growing farther down to the south, along the eastern bank of the Mississippi, until it became a decisive factor in bringing the whole of the Illinois territory into the American Union.

II

The scene of history now shifts to the "American Bottom," a strip of land in southwestern Illinois, extending from opposite the mouth of the Missouri for about 100 miles to the point where the Kaskaskia river formerly emptied its waters into the Mississippi.³²

³² A good description of the country is given by Prof. Alvord in *Ill. Hist. Collections*, Vol. ii., pp. 23ff.

The great fertility of the land soon attracted the white settlers, but not until the Catholic missionary had preceded and shown the way. There Father Pierre François Pinet³³ came to preach to the Indians shortly before 1700. He was born in Périgueux, France, November 11, 1660. He came to Canada as a Jesuit in 1694, and to Illinois in 1696, founding the mission of the Guardian Angel at Chicago among the Miami bands located there. But the mission was broken up the following year when Father Pinet left. One or two years later he returned to Illinois and went to the Tamaroas, an Illinois tribe on the Mississippi not far from the mouth of the Missouri in what was later known as the "American Bottom." There Father Gravier saw him in 1700 "performing in peace all the duties of a missionary."³⁴ The Cahokia tribe of Illinois Indians joined the Tamaroas, and the settlement became known later on as the village of Cahokia, still in existence.³⁵

Shortly afterward the Kaskaskia tribe decided to remove from their old home on the Illinois, near Starved Rock. There Father Gravier had ministered to them and to other tribes that had gathered around Fort St. Louis, notably the Peorias, since March, 1684. The mission bore the title of the Immaculate Conception. About 1,700 of the tribe decided to settle near d'Iberville, Louisiana, but Father Gravier succeeded in dissuading them, and induced them to locate in the southern part of the "American Bottom." There the new mission of Kaskaskia was begun, again under the title of the Immaculate Conception.³⁶

³³ THWAITES, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. lxiv, p. 278

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. lxv, p. 103.

³⁵ By letters patent of May, 1699, St. Vallier deprived the Jesuits of this mission, bestowing it upon priests sent out by the "Séminaire des Missions Étrangères" of Quebec. This proceeding was strongly opposed by the Jesuits and they did not consent to the change until 1701. Meanwhile Father Pinet remained with the Tamaroas until probably the spring of 1702 and then labored among the Kaskaskias. He died in Cahokia in 1704. The priests of the "Séminaire" remained in charge of the mission until the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1763-64, when they also left.

³⁶ A great deal of confusion has been caused among historians by this migration of the Kaskaskias. The missionaries themselves, in their letters, are sometimes rather indefinite as to the exact location of the tribe, simply inscribing them: "From the Mission of the Immaculate Conception of the Kaskaskias." *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. lxv, p. 264; Vol. lxvi, p. 245. F. A. Ogg, *op. cit.*, p. 188, mistakenly ascribes the founding of the new Kaskaskia to Father Pinet. The first baptism entered in the register of the Kaskaskia mission—and it must then have been at the old location near Fort St. Louis or Starved Rock, judging from the date—is from the hand of

A French trading post was soon established. A white settlement grew up here as at Cahokia around the missions. Inter-marriages with the Indians took place. Kaskaskia seems to have grown the more rapidly since it provided an excellent place of deposit and exchange, and from a mission station it speedily became not only the most important intermediate point in the traffic of the French up and down the river, but also the metropolis of the Bottom.

Between the most southern and the most northern villages other and smaller white settlements sprang up: Prairie du Rocher, Fort Chartres, St. Philippe and Grand Ruisseau. And these whites did not drive out the aborigines: "Near the French villages were the homes of the children of the prairie, together with some blacks from the south. The French always dwelt in peace with the American Indians, the management of whom they understood far better than the Anglo-Saxons."³⁷ Various writers, especially British officers and later French travelers, have at times passed very severe judgments upon these French settlers. However, "the first class has always been noted for its incapacity to appreciate the good characteristics of a civilization different from its own."³⁸ As for the depreciating remarks of some French travelers, they visited the region after the best French elements had crossed the river to the Spanish side with the beginning of the British regime in Illinois (1765). The picture framed in the mind after reading their records of Kaskaskia and Cahokia is not that of "the most debased ignorant and superstitious of humanity," but rather the reverse.

Most of these French settlers came from Canada, and with it

Father Gravier: In the year 1695, March 20th, I, Jacques Gravier, of the Society of Jesus, baptised Pierre Aco, newly-born of P. Michael Aco. Godfather was De Hautchy; Godmother, Maria Aramipinchicoue. OSMAN, *Starved Rock*, p. 141, note. The record is interesting because the father, Michael Aco, was one of the companions of La Salle, and later of Father Hennepin when he discovered the upper Mississippi. The mother, an Indian, was the daughter of the head chief of the Peorias. She was a fervent Catholic and was instrumental in converting her husband, whose lack of faith was already obvious to Father Hennepin. She also helped Fr. Gravier very much in the conversion of her tribe although her father was strongly opposed to Christianity. The difficulties Fr. Gravier had to contend with are detailed at length in his letter: *Relations*, Vol. lxiv, pp. 158-237.

³⁷ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 16.

³⁸ ALVORD in *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 21.

they retained constant communication through trade and exchange of messages on family affairs. Only a small number had come directly from France either through Canada or Louisiana. The majority, known as the "habitants," came from the lower class and were ignorant and illiterate. They were voyageurs and coureurs de bois, hardy, self-sufficient, reckless of their lives and inured to hardship and danger. Even among them there were found men of unusual type, such as Nicolet and Duluth and the physician who treated Father Marquette during his illness at Chicago, men born to roam the wilderness and to be the advance guard of civilization in unknown regions. The care-free lives of the voyageurs rather inclined them to disorderliness. "Yet their pleasures and vices were of a far milder type than those of their counterparts, the American backwoodsmen. The French always retained a certain respect for law and constituted authority. In their petty quarrels with each other, the Frenchmen saw no disgrace in seeking from the court a reparation of honor instead of ending them with the brutal fights common among the Americans."³⁹

It is due to their onesidedness that French and English travelers have so mercilessly condemned the Illinois French settlers. The picture of their village society would be incomplete if limited to the coureurs de bois and voyageurs. For it was never wholly vulgarized and depraved owing to the presence of many persons from the better class of France and Canada—the gentry, as Clarke called them. Accustomed to greater refinements of life than those afforded by the log cabin, they surrounded themselves with such elegancies as might be brought from Canada or elsewhere. Perhaps the most unbiased picture of these French-American groups is that given by the missionaries who spent their lives among them, and it presents the lights and shadows in their true perspective.⁴⁰

These members of the gentry lived far more elegantly than the American backwoodsmen and were their superiors in culture. Their houses were commodious, and life was made easy for them by a large retinue of slaves. In social intercourse they were pleasant, their hospitality was proverbial, and their courtesies to

³⁹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 29.

⁴⁰ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. x, pp. 91, 92, 93.

strangers constant. True, they long maintained the distinction between themselves and the more ignorant classes, and the democracy of the American frontier was not established among them. But this aloofness helped to preserve among them an element of refinement and elegance, however simple, which was always lacking in the more virile if less romantic communities of the American frontier.⁴¹

By far the largest number of these settlers were Catholics, faithful to their religion and zealous of their rights and privileges.⁴² In the management of the church property the villagers were associated with the priest through the vestrymen, who were elected for this purpose from among the most prominent men of the communities. The church was the center of the religious life of the settlement, as well as of its civic and social life. The people looked forward to the church festivals and occasional public processions as important events in their monotonous village life. At the church door the assemblies of the people met; there the auction of property was held. It was after the service that the Sunday dance took place to which came the men and maidens, and which the priest also graced by his presence. The Cahokia church was in ruins in 1778, but was rebuilt in the next few years. In Kaskaskia, however, "there was a huge old pile, extremely

⁴¹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 21. For further details about their homes, land tenure, etc., see pp. 21-22.

⁴² Some French Huguenots were found amongst them in later years, although they seem to have had no religious organization of their own. Among them was Jean Girault, born in London of Huguenot parents in 1755. The Cahokia records make mention of him in 1779. He resided there holding important military commissions in civil and military life. (*Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, pp. 20-21.) There was also Charles Gratiot, born in Switzerland of French Huguenot parents in 1753. He went to Canada and in 1777 he was in Cahokia where he was elected a justice of the court. He moved to St. Louis in 1781 where he became wealthy and prominent. *Ibid.*, p. 4. There were others besides, brought there by the English and American occupations; for we find Father de la Valinière accusing Father de St. Pierre of having unlawfully married Mr. Reith, a Catholic, and Miss Camp, a Protestant, at Cahokia, in 1787. *Am. Cath. Hist. Researches*, 1906, pp. 221-225. Although Catholics were predominant in the French settlements, it is apparent that no discrimination was made among the settlers on account of religion, and that all dwelt in peace together. The Cahokia records also have evidence of Irishmen being settled there before 1776. There was "Richard McCarty," an Irishman from Connecticut, married in Montreal, who wrote to his wife in French. He was captain of militia, and had a mill in Cahokia. Mention also is made in a court order of "Dominique O'danigan." *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 2.

awkward and ungainly, with its projecting eaves, its walls of hewn timber, perpendicularly planted and the interstices stuffed with mortar; with its quaint old-fashioned spire, and its dark storm-beaten casements."⁴³ The church was 104 feet long by 44 feet wide, and had been built by the Jesuits in 1753 largely through the personal sacrifices of the missionaries themselves. As the people were devoted to their religion, the priest exercised great influence over them. However indifferent and debauched the voyageurs and coureurs de bois might sometimes become through their life in the wilderness, they were easily brought by a vigorous priest to acknowledge their dependence upon religion. At the moment of death they always sought the consolations of the Church, and left by will money for the saying of Masses. The radical thought of France may have penetrated to some extent to the Illinois settlements, but in only one instance is there evidence of it: Louis Viviat, as the Kaskaskia Court Records attest, requested in his will that "no pomp and no ceremony mark his burial and that no payment be made for Masses for the dead since the deity is not mercenary, nor is heaven to be bought."⁴⁴ The unsettled conditions that followed upon the wresting of the Illinois territory from English control also brought disorder and a condition bordering on civil and religious anarchy. Fr. de St. Pierre, writing from Kaskaskia to Fr. Paget at Detroit, on February 18, 1786, alludes to this sad state of affairs: "Truly when I find the entire region so changed and filled with the worst of men, who fear neither God nor the law, I am altogether determined to leave at the first opportunity."⁴⁵

The settlements had then fallen on evil days, but during the French and English regimes there was a constant succession of pastors.⁴⁶ Under their fostering care the Indian missions had grown into prosperous communities when a sudden blow fell on them.⁴⁷ In pursuance of orders from France the Jesuits were to be expelled from the whole Louisiana territory, of which Illinois

⁴³ SHEA, quoted in *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 24.

⁴⁴ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. 24. Louis Viviat was a rich and prominent French trader. He also became a strong supporter of the British against American interests. *Ibid.*, Vol. v, p. 7, note.

⁴⁵ *Am. Cath. Hist. Researches*, 1906, p. 236.

⁴⁶ See the list for Cahokia in *The Fortnightly Review*, Vol. xx, p. 323.

⁴⁷ THWAITES, *Jesuit Relations*, Vol. lxx, pp. 212ff; *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. x, pp. 62ff.

was a part. The news reached New Orleans in 1762, but no proceedings were begun until after the treaty of peace with England the following year. The Jesuits were then cited before the Superior Council and condemned. A special courier was sent from New Orleans to Illinois to notify the Jesuits established there of their expulsion. The decree of condemnation was read to Father Watrin, the superior at Kaskaskia. The spirited narrative of this whole iniquitous proceeding, perhaps from the pen of Father Watrin himself, sets forth the bad faith and hypocrisy of its promoters. Three main reasons were assigned for their banishment: they had not taken care of their missions; they had thought only of making their estates valuable; they were usurpers of the Vicariate General of New Orleans. To argue was useless and to resist still more so.

Father Watrin was handed a copy of the decree just read to him and then made to leave his room at once while the seal was put upon it. The same was done with the other missionaries in the house.⁴⁸ There was left one hall where they could remain together although with great inconvenience, but even this favor was refused them. Driven from their house, the missionaries found quarters as best they could. The superior, sixty-seven years old, departed on foot to find a lodging a long league away with a confrère of his, Father Meurin,⁴⁹ a missionary to the savages; and the French who met him on the road showed their open displeasure at seeing the persecution begin with him. As soon as the savages learned that he had arrived among them, they came to show to him and to Father Meurin the share which they took in their distress. The other missionaries were crowded together in a house for a month. They were permitted to take their clothes and books, and the food found in their residence was allowed for their support. Finally it came to making the inventory. Time was necessary to collect and put in order the furniture of a large house, the chattels of an important estate and the cattle scattered in the fields and woods. "Besides," tersely remarks the writer of this narrative, "there was reason for not hurrying too much; the longer the delays, the better they paid

⁴⁸ A picture of it is given in *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. i, p. 463.

⁴⁹ The mission of the Indians was situated at a distance of one and a quarter leagues from the village. *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. x, p. 68.

those employed in that task." The inhabitants, not knowing whether they would have a pastor in the future, sent two petitions to the commandant to have Father Aubert retained in that capacity, but to no avail. Everything being now ready, a sale was held at the church door at the close of High Mass, and the Jesuit property went to the highest bidder, Paul Jussiaume, who seems to have acted for Jean Baptiste Bauvais, the latter becoming the actual owner of the land and buildings.⁵⁰ Vandalism ran riot in the chapel of the house: the steps of the altar were thrown down; the sacred vessels and pictures were taken away; the ornaments were given to negresses known for their evil lives; a large crucifix from the altar and the candelabra were found in a house whose reputation was not good.

When the sentence had thus been carried out with a vengeance, the missionaries were put on a boat and after twenty-seven days arrived in New Orleans, bound for France. But one of them was determined to make a supreme effort. Touched to the quick by the piteous pleas of the Indians, and knowing besides "in what danger the Illinois neophytes were of soon forgetting religion if they remained long without missionaries," Father Meurin, although sickly for years, insisted with so much determination that he be allowed to return to his former field of labor, that permission was granted him together with a promise that a pension of 600 livres would be asked for him at court. When his confrères embarked for France he returned to Illinois, but did not take up his residence at his former mission, preferring to reside on the western bank of the river, then under the Spanish flag, in the village of St. Genevieve. He, however, visited the various

⁵⁰ The Cahokia priests, being Sulpitians sent out by the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères of Quebec, were not included in the decree of expulsion. But the superior in charge, Father Forget, on hearing of the decree against the Jesuits, sold all he could and retired. (*Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 323; Gage to Conway, June 24, 1766.) On May 3, 1767, Father Boiret wrote from Quebec to Father Meurin complaining that Father Forget sold in 1763 all their property, movable and immovable, belonging to the Holy Family mission at Cahokia, while the inhabitants made opposition to the execution of this irregular sale. He shows that Father Forget, claiming to act in the name of the Séminaire des Missions Étrangères at Paris, had no authority to do so since the Séminaire of Quebec to which the mission and goods in question belonged, was independent of the Paris institution. He asks Father Meurin to help him to get this mission on its feet again, promising to send priests as soon as possible. (*Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 565.)

Illinois settlements regularly, being now the only priest left to attend the widely scattered settlements.

On March 23, 1767, he wrote from the "Rectory of the Immaculate Conception at Kaskaskia, English colony, diocese of Quebec, at the Illinois"⁵¹ to Bishop Briand, the new incumbent of that see. He details at length the deplorable condition in which he finds himself and begs the bishop to send priests to administer the parishes of the Immaculate Conception at Kaskaskia, of St. Joseph at Prairie du Rocher, of the Holy Family at Cahokia. Besides these Illinois missions he attends the parish of St. Genevieve, his residence, and the newly founded village of St. Louis, some thirty miles to the north. The absence of priests had quickly worked havoc among the wilderness settlements and he complains of disorder, of churches in disrepair, and of the opposition of a few parishioners "who say openly that I have no title to the parish, which they would not have dared to in the time of the Messrs. Sterling and Farmer, English commanders who gave me their fullest protection."

Shortly after Father Meurin's return the political status of the inhabitants had been changed, and their communities suffered considerably because of it. In October, 1765, the Illinois country passed from French to British control. The proclamation to this effect issued by General Th. Gage, commander-in-chief of the army, contained an important clause, granting the French the right of the free exercise of the Roman Catholic religion in the same manner as in Canada. It provided, moreover, that all the inhabitants of Illinois who had been subjects of the king of France might, if they desired, sell their estates and retire with their effects to Louisiana. No restraint would be placed on their emigration except for debt or on account of criminal processes. Both concessions, aimed at winning and retaining the French, failed to do so. The wealth of the country soon became considerably impaired under the British occupation because of the exodus of a large number of French families. The best and most influential among them, taking their cattle, grain and effects across the ferries at Cahokia and Kaskaskia, found homes in St. Louis and St. Genevieve on the Spanish side.⁵² Probably a large

⁵¹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 521ff.

⁵² *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. x., p. 23.

part of these left in the hope that in Louisiana they might enjoy their ancient laws and privileges to a larger extent. Gordon, an English traveler who passed through the country shortly afterward, bears eloquent witness to the desolation in his "Journal"⁵³ under date of August 19, 1766. The English authorities themselves were deeply concerned over the depopulation. Sterling, writing to Gage under date of December 25, 1765, says: "The inhabitants (of Kaskaskia and Cahokia) complain very much for want of priests. There is but one now remains, the rest either having died or gone away, and he stays on the other side (of the river—Father Meurin) . . . The priest might be of great use to us if he was brought over to this side, which I make no doubt might be effectuated, provided his former appointments were allowed to him, which were 600 livres per annum from the king as priest to the Indians."⁵⁴ And Gage, writing to Conway under date of June 24, 1766, transmits to him a lengthy document relative to the "Effects of the Jesuits" (*Quelques Traits sur la Mission des Jésuites aux Illinois*).⁵⁵ He frankly disapproves of the procedure of the French in expelling the Jesuits and selling their property, the more so since this sale took place after the conclusion of the treaty with Great Britain which ceded the Illinois territory to the British crown. He intends to have the property restored as far as possible, and concludes: "The inhabitants are demanding and soliciting for a priest, and if they get none go over to the Spanish side of the river, a circumstance that would at present be very prejudicial to our interest."⁵⁶ But priests were very difficult to get, and for some time Father Meurin remained the only one to minister to the Catholics of the Illinois territory. Bishop Briand made him Vicar General, and writing to him on August 7, 1767, he promises to send him one or two priests in the spring of the following year.⁵⁷ On May 9, 1767, Father Meurin had asked that at least four priests be sent to attend the various missions, but the Bishop was obviously unable to grant his request for that many helpers.

⁵³ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 299.

⁵⁴ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 124.

⁵⁵ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 326.

⁵⁶ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 323.

⁵⁷ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. xi, p. 587.

In 1768, however, Father Pierre Gibault arrived from Canada, and his name figures prominently and honorably in the subsequent history of Illinois. The British regime was of short duration and marked by no events of importance. No attempt was made to develop the resources of the country, and the settlements already in existence kept on steadily declining. Then came the revolution on the Atlantic seaboard, and the various colonies, now formed into an independent nation, endeavored to push their boundaries westward to the Mississippi. The widely scattered white settlements west of the Alleghenies suffered much from the depredations of Indian war parties, who were encouraged by the English authorities to harass them. Lieutenant Governor Hamilton even paid the Indians in goods for the scalps of whites they brought in.⁵⁸ The incursions of the savages, assisted by the Tories, upon the frontiers of New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Kentucky were almost continuous during the spring and summer of 1778. George Rogers Clark had successfully led the Virginia militia in several retaliatory expeditions against the Indians. But he became gradually aware that, as long as the British held control in the French villages of the Illinois, these would be rallying points for the Indian war parties sent out against the Kentucky posts. He saw that the surest defense against these forays would be to capture these posts and win the friendship of the French.⁵⁹ Governor Patrick Henry favored the plan which was to be carried out secretly whilst ostensibly designed as a defense for Kentucky. Overcoming all obstacles by his dauntless courage, Clark traveled down the Ohio and then across country with his little army. The English were altogether unaware of his coming and he entered Kaskaskia and took it by surprise on the night of July 4, 1778. It was well known to him that the inhabitants were not very strongly attached to the British. The next morning, therefore, after assuring Father Gibault, the pastor⁶⁰ "who was rather prejudiced in favor of us," Clark writes, that his people would not be molested in any way because of their religion, they all gladly took the "Oath of alle-

⁵⁸ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 37, note 3.

⁵⁹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 42.

⁶⁰ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 121. Father Gibault was now the only priest in Illinois, Father Meurin having died in 1777 at Prairie du Rocher. Cf. *The Beginnings of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction in St. Louis (1764-1776)*, by Rev. J. J. Conway, S.J., in the Missouri Historical Society's *Publications*, No. 14, St. Louis, 1897.

giance to America." The other French settlements in the American Bottom were soon won over. There remained only Post St. Vincent in Indiana, from which Clark wished by all means to expel the English, "for without the possession of that post all our views would have been blasted."⁶¹ Clark sent for Father Gibault, knowing that "he was inclined to the American interest previous to our arrival in the country. . . . In answer to all my queries he informed me that it was not worth my while to cause any military preparation to be made at the Falls (of the Ohio) for the attack of St. Vincent, although the place was strong and a great number of Indians in the neighborhood . . . that he expected that when the inhabitants were fully acquainted with what had passed at the Illinois and the present happiness of their friends and made fully acquainted with the nature of the war, that their sentiments would greatly change . . . that if it was agreeable to me, he would take this business on himself and had no doubt of his being able to bring that place over to the American interest without my being at the trouble of marching troops against it; that his business being altogether spiritual he wished that another person might be charged with the temporal part of the embassy, but he would privately direct the whole, and he named Doctor Lafont as his associate."⁶² They set out on their patriotic journey, and Clark further reports: "Mr. Gibault and party arrived safe and after their spending a day or two in explaining matters to the people, they universally acceded to the proposal . . . and went in a body to the church where the oath of allegiance was administered to them in the most solemn manner . . . and the American flag displayed."

Vincennes was retaken by the English and the following year Clark set out with an armed expedition to reconquer it: "We were conducted out of the town by the inhabitants and Mr. Gibault the priest, who after a very suitable discourse to the purpose, gave us all absolution. And we set out on a forlorn hope indeed."⁶³ But this "forlorn hope" issued in a brilliant victory over the English forces, and gained for America the per-

⁶¹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 239.

⁶² *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 237-238.

⁶³ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v., p. 139.

manent control of the Northwest.⁶⁴ But from that moment on Father Gibault was looked upon as a "Rebel" by the English authorities, as well as by his ecclesiastical superiors in Canada. Accusations of every nature, none of which were ever in any way substantiated, were brought against him. In his report to Lord George Sackville, secretary of state for the colonies, Lieutenant Governor Hamilton, who was captured by Clark at the surrender of Vincennes, penned this philippic: "One of the deserters at Vincennes was brother to Gibault the priest, who had been an active agent for the rebels and whose vicious and immoral conduct was sufficient to do infinite mischief in a country where ignorance and bigotry give full scope to the depravity of a licentious ecclesiastic. This wretch it was who absolved the French inhabitants from their allegiance to the King of Great Britain. To enumerate the vices of the inhabitants would be to give a long catalogue, but to assert that they are not in possession of a single virtue is no more than truth, and justice require; still the most eminently vicious and scandalous was the reverend Monsieur Gibault."⁶⁵

Some years later, May 28, 1788, Father Gibault wrote to his superior, the Bishop of Quebec,⁶⁶ asking to be recalled "because of my age of fifty-one years, the need I have of being better sheltered after so many hardships which inevitably accompany so many journeys and long trips." He found that he had been accused of various misdemeanors, the gravest of which obviously was that "he had been active for the American Republic." The Bishop of Quebec was adamant and in a letter to Bishop Carroll,

⁶⁴ Clark refers twice, at great length, to the important rôle played by Father Gibault; in his "Letter to George Mason, November 19, 1779" (*Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v., pp. 121ff) and in his "Memoir," *ibid.*, p. 237ff. Virginia realized the great debt she owed him and in a "Letter of Instructions to Clark from the Virginia Council, December 12, 1778" (*ibid.*, pp. 78ff), we read: "Upon a fair presumption that the people about Detroit have similar inclinations with those of Illinois and Wabash, I think it possible that they may be brought to expel their British masters and become fellow-citizens of a free state. I recommend this to your serious consideration and to consult with some confidential person on the subject. Perhaps Mr. Gibault the priest (to whom this country owes many thanks for his zeal and services) may promote this affair." And Patrick Henry, writing to Clark on December 15, 1778 (*ibid.*, p. 87), says: "I beg you will present my compliments to Mr. Gibault and Doctor Lafont and thank them for me for their good services for the state."

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 184.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 585.

dated October 3, 1788,⁶⁷ he wrote: "Complaints of different kinds, especially of treason towards the government, caused my predecessors to entertain some antipathy towards him, so much so that I propose to give him no employment for the future. That would be easier for you to do." Matters were amicably adjusted between him and his new Bishop and he continued to serve the French Catholics now in Vincennes, then in St. Genevieve, visiting the Illinois country as opportunity offered. For the high hopes raised among the French by the American occupation had not materialized. Notwithstanding repeated appeals from the inhabitants, Congress was dilatory in giving the country a stable civil government. Factions arose as the turbulent years went on without bringing relief, and the population of the American Bottom kept on steadily declining. The period of greatest emigration occurred between 1787 and 1790 when anarchy reached its climax and the Spaniards on the other side of the river were holding out the greatest inducements. A census list of Kaskaskia for the year 1790 shows only forty-four heads of families, a decrease of 779 in the French population of the village since 1783. The picture of Kaskaskia in 1790 as described by its people in a petition to Major Hamtranck⁶⁸ is one of utter misery and despair: "Our horses, horned cattle and corn are stolen and destroyed without the power of making any effective resistance. Our houses are in ruins and decay; our lands are uncultivated; debtors abscond and absconding; our little common destroyed. We are apprehensive of a dearth of corn and our best prospects are misery and distress, or, what is more probably, an untimely death by the hand of savages. We are well convinced that all these misfortunes have befallen us for want of some superior or commanding authority, for ever since the cession of this territory to Congress we have been neglected as an abandoned people to encounter all the difficulties that are always attendant upon anarchy and confusion. Neither did we know from authority until latterly to what power we were subject. The greater part of our citizens have left the country on this account to reside in

⁶⁷ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. v, p. 586-590.

⁶⁸ He was Commandant at Post Vincennes and a Canadian Catholic who had served in the Revolution as captain in the Fifth New York Regiment. *Am. Cath. Hist. Res.*, 1906, p. 236.

the Spanish dominions; others are now following and we are fearful, nay certain, that without your assistance the small remainder will be obliged to follow their example.”⁶⁹ The picture was only too true. But fortunately the more energetic families who moved across the Mississippi into territory that was for a few more years to remain under Spanish dominion, were not lost forever to the American commonwealth.

On the soil of Illinois, however, they have left their impress for all time to come, and history can never forget what these French Catholic explorers and pioneers have wrought there. From the days of Marquette and Allouez and La Salle and Tonty and Hennepin down to Father Gibault they carried on their work of discovery and civilization against the greatest odds. Illinois and America owe to them a debt of patriotic gratitude. And in this centenary year of Illinois statehood, when it is proposed to erect a centennial memorial building, nothing could be more fitting than that in it a statue should be erected or some other suitable commemoration should be made of that staunch French-American most deserving of recognition—Father Pierre Gibault.

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⁶⁹ *Ill. Hist. Coll.*, Vol. ii, p. cli.